

Center Spotlight

Local Governments Showcased in Nation's First Digital Counties Survey

Rhonda Wilson, June 2003

Based on a population category of 500,000 or more, [Maricopa County, Ariz.](#), ranks first in utilizing information technology (IT) to deliver high quality service to its customers and citizens, according to the 2003 Digital Counties Survey, a new study conducted jointly by the Center for Digital Government, National Association of Counties ([NACo](#)) and [Government Technology](#) magazine.

Underwritten by [Microsoft Corp.](#), the Digital Counties Survey is the first in a series of national studies by the Center examining how governments are evolving in their use of IT to improve the overall delivery of services to their customers and citizens. City and state governments will be profiled in the coming months. Results from all of the surveys will be used as a bellwether for electronic government and provide models for best practices.

Launched in March, the Digital Counties Survey grouped counties into four categories based on population: 500,000 or more; 250,000-499,999; 150,000-249,999; and less than 150,000. Taking first-place positions in the last three population categories, respectively, are Prince William County, Va.; York County, S.C.; and Charles County, Md.

All counties in the United States were invited to participate. Officials responded to a set of 17 questions and ranked their jurisdiction according to a four-point scale, providing URLs and background data for final verification and validation. The questions were developed after months of input from recognized local government experts.

"The Digital Counties Survey shows that technology is truly transforming government as we know it at the county level," said Cathilea Robinett, executive director of the Center for Digital Government. "In an era of scarce public resources, information technology holds particular promise in helping local governments execute more effectively in producing priority-driven results. We are pleased to support and acknowledge the hard work and innovations put forth by these county government leaders."

Digital Counties Survey Statistics

In every population category, 38 percent or more of respondents offered the public emergency preparedness information as a direct link on the homepage of the county website. An average of 82.3 percent of all counties offered the public the ability to search for 50 percent or more of county job information online. On average, 85 percent of all respondents provide e-mail for their governing body with an average response time of a few days. Fifteen percent of the counties provide either audio or video



The Center for Digital Government is a national research and advisory institute providing government, industry and education leaders with decision support, research and educational resources to help them effectively incorporate new technologies in the 21st century.



or some live streaming video to share meetings of the county governing body with the public. Many provide cable television coverage.

"The Web has become a critical tool for service delivery in counties," said NACo Executive Director Larry E. Naake. "Citizens have come to expect the same convenience from counties that they receive from buying books and paying their utility bills online. The winning counties offer excellent examples of how to bring government closer to the people and improve the way services are provided."

The Top Ten

Rounding out the top ten behind Maricopa County in the 500,000 or more population category are Miami-Dade County, Fla.; Montgomery County, Md., and Orange County, Fla. (tied for third); Orange County, Calif., and San Diego County, Calif. (tied for fourth); Riverside County, Calif.; Los Angeles County, Calif.; Bernalillo County, N.M., and Kent County, Mich. (tied for seventh); Fairfax County, Va.; Contra Costa County, Calif., and Fulton County, Ga. (tied for ninth); and Mecklenburg County, N.C.

"On behalf of the leaders and technologists at Maricopa County, we thank the Center for Digital Government and NACo for this very exciting recognition," said Linden Thatcher, CIO of Maricopa County. "Where once technology was seen as an infrastructure used by individual departments to meet operational needs, it is now known as the enabling foundation which supports every government leader, service provider and decision maker throughout the entire enterprise. Within our region, we consistently strive to partner with the State of Arizona and City of Phoenix to build a transparent intergovernmental 'Digital Desert' culture."

"This award shows that Maricopa County is leading the way into the 21st century, providing information and services to its citizens through state of the art technology," added Fulton Brock, chairman, Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

Rounding out the top ten behind Prince William County in the 250,000-499,999 population category are Dakota County, Minn.; Johnson County, Kan.; Lee County, Fla., and Seminole County, Fla. (tied for fourth); Ada County, Idaho and Volusia County, Fla. (tied for fifth); Greenville County, S.C., and Sarasota County, Fla. (tied for sixth); Lucas County, Ohio; Utah County, Utah; Imperial Polk County, Fla.; and Washtenaw County, Mich.

Rounding out the top ten behind York County, S.C. in the 150,000-249,999 population category are Leon County, Fla.; McLean County, Ill.; Frederick County, Md.; Clermont County, Ohio; Hamilton County, Ind.; Racine County, Wis.; Jackson County, Ore.; Carroll County, Md.; Cumberland County, Pa., and El Dorado County, Calif. (tied for tenth).

Rounding out the top ten behind Charles County, Md., in the less than 150,000 population category are Florence County, S.C., Hernando County, Fla., and Sutter County, Calif. (tied for second); Stearns County, Minn.; Cochise County, Ariz.; and Skagit County, Wash.; Blue Earth County, Minn.; Albemarle County, Va.; Steuben County, N.Y.; Randolph County, N.C.; Eagle County, Colo., Pennington County, S.D., and Stanly County, N.C. (tied for tenth).

In recognition of their achievements, the top-ranked counties will be honored at NACo's annual conference and exposition on July 13 in Milwaukee. In August, the Center will publish a Best of Breed report with profiles of some of the most innovative, cutting-edge programs gleaned from the Digital Counties Survey.

For more information on the Digital Counties Survey, contact Rhonda Wilson at 916/932-1321 or rwilson@centerdigitalgov.com

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